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BETWEEN LUCKY JIM AND GEORGE SMILEY

The public policy role of intelligence scholars

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Introduction

The study of intelligence, as an academic field, continues to grow, as does the public's fascination with it. Yet, lots of empirical gaps remain, often for good and necessary reasons. The layers of secrecy have historically ensured that the intelligence community is insulated and denied access (intentionally or otherwise) to the world of academia and all the research resources and findings present within it. We would naturally expect that there would be very limited prospects for research impact in this field of government activity (particularly for those who study it) and yet, as shown by the analysis of this chapter, the opposite is true.

This chapter primarily concerns the impact academia can have on the government's analytical function.[1] In doing so, it aims to speak to several important agendas for researchers engaged in the arts, humanities and social sciences aiming to generate 'research impact' and policy relevance. Narrowly, it evaluates the generation of impact with the UK's government's central machinery for analysis, and it does this via a series of UK research council funded projects, collectively known as 'Lessons Learned'. More widely, the chapter aims to speak to agendas of those seeking to engage with government and a public accountability both for the research council money we secured for this project and also in terms of how academia has been engaging with government.

The 'Lessons Learned' projects we focus on have gone through four iterations, beginning in 2008. The first iteration was initially funded by an internal university grant which covered the development of a requirements-led seminar series held at the Cabinet Office and Foreign Office (Dover & Goodman 2011).[2] This then became an AHRC-funded project that was run in conjunction with the Ministry of Defence and the Cabinet Office to provide advice on developments in academic literature, as well as support requirements-led papers and seminars. For the third iteration, we made applications to our respective university's enterprise projects to secure funding for a fractional appointment to work on matching government needs and academic capabilities. For the fourth iteration, the AHRC funded the project again, this time partnered only with the Cabinet Office, which had a tighter set of terms around the provision of policy-related academic papers and seminars, but with the addition of the right of initiation of projects from the academic organisers. We refer to these four iterations collectively as 'Lessons Learned' because they all

retain the core concepts of: (1) matching government analysts with appropriate academic expertise, (2) providing open source challenge to government and (3) promoting interchange between the two communities that ensured the relationship incorporates sufficient elements of uploading as well as downloading to and from the academic community.

Within the 'lessons learned' project – it should be noted – we actively approached the scholars for this work – rather than issuing an open call – based on two criteria: (1) subject matter expertise, and (2) a track record of communicating their research to policy officials or those outside of academic circles but within discrete settings. We faced the challenge of these incentive structures with those who contributed to the 'lessons learned' project and we settled upon a pattern of contributors editing and revising their existing research for Whitehall stakeholders, rather than the creation of original research to fit a task, as this fell outside of impact criteria, they could claim credit for with their institution.

The mechanics of research impact with the security community

The practical business of government intelligence and security exists, in the main, in conditions of (necessary) secrecy, and consequently there are additional challenges to recording impact than might otherwise be the case with less security focussed parts of government. There has historically been a measure of ad-hoc interaction between the UK Government's analytical community with individual academics and, of course, with those in privileged or knowledgeable positions outside of the community, but without the necessity to acknowledge that work. Universities – being public institutions, albeit funded in an increasingly private way – are a key source of knowledge and innovation for the country. It is not a new territory to make the case that there are untapped synergies between academia and the security communities.

The value derived and the impact generated

Driving our approach were a series of considerations about how both communities could derive mutual benefit and, by extension, generate impact: (i) engagement with academics who have conducted research on similar topics to those being investigated by intelligence analysts using open source data has the benefit of providing **critical checks and balances**, as well as enrichment of a fragmentary dataset; (ii) engagement between academia and analysts from a closed intelligence community provides **a forum for challenging conventional wisdom** and assessments made largely on the basis of intelligence, and to reduce mirror imaging and group-think in a unique forum; (iii) engagement with academia provides a valuable **analytical resource**: it can provide trends analysis based on statistical data capture applicable to a range of thematic topics using both random and structured sampling; and (iv) engagement with the academic community may serve to **enrich knowledge and the intelligence picture**, providing information and knowledge left gapped by intelligence coverage.

The definition of intelligence varies considerably. The classic definition was provided by Sherman Kent nearly seventy years ago. Kent's definition divides intelligence into three parts: intelligence as knowledge, intelligence as an organisation and intelligence as an activity (Kent, 1949). This gives us some insight into the nature of intelligence: it is an organisational activity that produces knowledge. Both the intelligence and academic communities seek to advance knowledge and to do so via the selection of, and discrimination between, various sources of information. Both communities try to make robust assessments that have utility in the real world. As such, both spheres share a common core purpose, albeit delivered to different ends.

For the less sensitive areas of government, interaction with the UK's academic community has been widely encouraged, and schemes put in place to facilitate it. There have been successive moves in central government to encourage civil servants not only to seek outside expert views, but to have the implementation of policies tested by expert outsiders. In 2013, the UK Government established a network of seven independent centres to inform government decision-making through the provision of independently assessed evidence. The 'What Works Network' covers a range of policy areas, including: crime, health care, social care and education. Amongst others, the *London School of Economics* acts as a host for the *What Works Centre* dedicated to looking at local economic growth (UK Government, August 2015). In 2015, the *What Works initiative* expanded further in its outreach to academia by establishing a *Cross-Government Trial Advice Panel*, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).[3] The panel, comprising twenty-five academics, was established to educate civil servants in the use of experimental and quasi-experimental research methods (Cabinet Office, 2015). By 2015, a considerable infrastructure had been put in place by the Cabinet Office to encourage civil servants to seek external expertise, including academia, to inform a wide range of policy making areas under the *Open Policy Making* initiative, using the 'latest analytical techniques, and taking an agile, iterative approach to implementation' (UK Government, 2015).

These clearly demonstrate a significant effort by the UK Government to utilise external expertise from, amongst others, the academic community. However, engagement between the spheres of policy making and the academic community is unlikely to be replicated at an equal scale between academia (and particularly those parts which study intelligence) and the national security community, largely due to the obvious requirement for secrecy and the protection of sensitive information. Two major reviews into issues of National Security have highlighted the importance of more engagement between the two spheres. In 2004, the first major review into the intelligence underpinnings of the Iraq War (*Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction*, more commonly known as the *Butler Report*) made several recommendations encouraging the value of engagement between the national security community and academia. The first recommendation was to provide an outlet for analysts within a closed national security community to challenge conventional wisdom, received options and assessments based largely on actively gathered intelligence. It was from this recommendation that the 'lessons learned' project sprang, and the benchmark against which we set for the project.

Our interaction has included a number of disparate aspects, funded by a variety of bodies. They include several ESRC and AHRC-funded seminar series which brought together academics and government security practitioners to have structured discussions around the development of intelligence activity in the twenty-first century. The more significant interaction occurred via an RCUK Global Uncertainties grant in partnership with the Ministry of Defence and the Cabinet Office. The grant was used to commission academic research into subjects of use and relevance to both departments. Topics were either pre-selected by the government, or via a process in which topics could be suggested. The principal findings were based upon the use of 'contemporary historical' events (ranging from sixty years to a few months) for two purposes: reflecting examples of good and bad analyses with the objective of identifying process lessons; and using the history and evolution of a given event to provide high-level context to an ongoing issue. The research output was exhibited in two ways: the publication of an edited collection of papers by Georgetown University Press called *Learning from the Secret Past*; and the publication on the AHRC's Policy Publications site of a series of commissioned reports.[4]

Taken together, the benefit accrued – or the real-world impact – of these provides the potential to reduce the cognitive biases of 'mirror-imaging' and 'group-think', allowing analysts to discuss assessments and theories with subject matter experts who may provide a different perspective based on a different body of source material. Whilst not formally part of the challenge function another aspect of our involvement – the *King's Intelligence Studies Programme* (of which one author leads and the other has been involved) – is a good example of a higher education platform where government analysts are encouraged to move beyond the tunnel vision of their specific day jobs to reflect upon their activity in a wider context (Goodman & Omand, 2008).

Engagement with academia for the purpose of challenge analysis may benefit a closed national security community by providing an additional avenue for systematic and structured challenges. Whilst there is a wide difference in research methodology across different areas of academia, it can be broadly said that professional academics will have achieved a high degree of proficiency in terms of research practice, critiquing evidence and argument through doctoral training, peer review and professional engagement within the academic community. There are certainly de-minimis standards for UK PhD students in research-intensive universities – that is driven by research council recognition – around research training and the rigours of peer review enforce these standards for career academics. Butler recommended that challenge analysis should be a systematic function of the UK's intelligence assessments: "Challenge should be an accepted and routine part of the assessment process as well as an occasional formal exercise, built into the system" (Butler, 2004). Whilst we have aspired to embed such a system, by pushing it from the academic side, we have little evidence that this is occurring within the practitioner community.

The second key benefit outlined by Butler is the potential for widening the range of information available to the analysts within the closed national security community: "We emphasise the importance of the Assessments Staff and the JIC [Joint Intelligence Committee] having access to a wide range of information, especially in circumstances where information on political and social issues will be vital" (Butler, 2004). Academics within research-intensive universities are likely to have more time in which to produce in-depth assessments and have the freedom to conduct structured fieldwork. Furthermore, the range of sources of information available to academics, unencumbered by any restrictions of official secrecy, is potentially wider than that of a closed national security community. In our dealings with Whitehall and other law enforcement communities (broadly defined), there have been significant challenges for officials to get hold of research materials that academics think of as their bedrock, such as electronic journal holdings (JSTOR and similar), which are blocked by financial and structural considerations, and that when access is granted, the size of these databases is often overwhelming for the analyst fresh to them.

Following extensive consultation within the intelligence community and external subject matter experts, the *Blackett Review of High Impact Low Probability Risks* (2011) identified several recommendations to strengthen the government's approach to assessing strategic shocks which could, in turn, be applied more widely across government. While the recommendations of the *Blackett Review* built upon the practices that existed within the community, one of the key factors in the review was the need for the UK Government to include a greater measure of external expertise in their assessment processes. Of the eleven recommendations identified by the *Blackett Review*, six concern engagement between closed intelligence communities and academia, three of which were specifically addressed to the Cabinet Office, where the central analytical function of the community sits. *The Blackett Review* highlighted

many benefits for the intelligence community of engaging more fully with the academic community: *to inform key risk assumptions; to inform judgements and analysis; to better detect early signs of strategic shock or surprise; to inform the development of internal and external risk communication strategies*; and *to strengthen the scrutiny of the National Risk Assessment*. Although these recommendations were identified in the context of a specific type of risk assessment, the recommendations are widely applicable to other areas of assessment and analysis across the UK Government, and should be seen in their widest context.[5]

The range of possible benefits that can be imputed through the *Butler* and *Blackett* reviews are certainly sufficient to warrant a further and deeper exploration into the operational elements of an enduring relationship between the two communities. Part of that analysis comes from making a comparison between fundamental elements of the activities of the two communities, and part comes from understanding where the differences in source information and methodological approaches may lead to limitations in engagement. Elsewhere, we have explored these issues in depth, but the bottom line is that each community has much to gain from the other (Dover, Goodman & White, 2017).

The benefits of greater engagement

Our interaction with the security community has extended for more than a decade. Based on this long and continuing engagement, a number of important benefits can be identified in trying to get the two communities to work together more effectively. This section will consider these, as well as highlighting some of the obstacles that need to be overcome or, at least, borne in mind when considering such engagement in the future.

As argued in the Butler Report, the main benefit to the closed national security community from enhanced cooperation comes in the form of *challenge analysis*. Engaging with individuals who have conducted research on similar topics using open source data has the benefit of providing quality control, corroboration or confirmation methods, as well as the enrichment of the national security community's fragmentary dataset. In this way, and if organised effectively, engagement with academia offers a closed national security community the benefit of an additional open source capability drawn from organisations specifically geared to providing all source analysis. Systematic engagement with academia may also provide the benefit of external peer review, particularly on technical issues (Butler, 2004). It is a missed opportunity that there is no intelligence and security version of the UK Defence Academy's Staff College (an idea that was initially mooted by academics to the Professional Head of Intelligence Analysis (PHIA) in 2008 and subsequently published in IISS's Strategic Balance) as a means by which to place these symbiotic relationships on a firmer footing. We have argued – in print, very recently – that this is something that requires urgent reform and investment (Devanny, Dover, Goodman & Omand, 2018).

A related area of potential benefit is in the provision of an alternative avenue of *corroboration and validation*. Engagement with the academic community offers the government's analytical community a substantial intellectual resource capable of providing key contextual insight. This can be provided in the following ways:

1 Trends analysis based on statistical data capture applicable to a range of thematic topics using both random and structured sampling. Similarly, with qualitative research methods, of historical trends and essential context.
2 Corroboration or validation from academic research that has undergone more rigorous testing and research techniques.

3 Corroboration or validation from academic research conducted at a more granular level in terms of topic matter.
4 Corroboration or validation analysis from academic research derived from a wider or alternative pool of information.

Finally, a key benefit is the *enrichment of knowledge and the intelligence picture*. The national security community's necessity to respond to short-term customer-placed requirements will inevitably leave significant gaps in the knowledge generated by intelligence coverage. Whilst the knowledge enrichment that can be provided by academia is likely to be more contextual and environmental than the core business of intelligence, it still has its necessary place and value in the ability to correctly interpret information about other regions and cultures.

The government's national security community could quite feasibly increase its contacts across a wide range of disciplines, research organisations, universities and think tanks both in the UK and abroad. In doing so, it may be able to leverage or influence the direction of researchers without necessarily having to provide funding, although the reciprocity of the relationship is likely to have to be proved over the medium term to sustain such an arrangement. Access to the views of the national security community on mutual topics of interest, and the chance to use academic research to inform and impact upon decision-making on issues of national security, is likely to be incentive enough to achieve involvement from a sufficient portion of the relevant academic community.

However, the benefit of engagement is not all balanced on the side of the national security community. Academia and academics stand to benefit in several ways through closer interaction between the two worlds. Like the national security community, the first benefit to academia comes in *corroboration and challenge analysis*. For academics, engagement with individuals who are analysing similar topics using classified data has the benefit of providing them with informal measures of quality control, corroboration or confirmation to academic hypotheses and judgements. Similarly, to the benefits that a closed analytical community could derive from engagement with academia, academia may gain the benefit of external peer review, the reduction of their own collective group-think and mirror imaging, and the provision of a unique arena for challenging from those with unique and unrepeatable datasets. However, this is obviously heavily contingent on the ability and willingness of a closed analytical community to be able to communicate assessments in confidence at an unclassified or open level. Such willingness is very closely aligned with issues of trust. This will be dependent on the internal risk versus benefits assessment of the closed analytical community, and places the academic in a supplicant position as regards knowing or understanding the quality of information they are receiving.

The second benefit comes from the *enrichment of knowledge*. Where a closed national security community could benefit from being able to close information and knowledge gaps by steering or influence academic research, the academic community can equally gain from this process by being given a unique insight into areas of research that would have an impact and benefit for national security and official policy. This could provide a high impact for future academic research commissioned or approved by academic funding bodies and higher education institutions. There is a pressure within academic departments to be connected more with external stakeholders, and thus for most academics, whilst the intellectual advantages of engaging with the national security community will be very real, the necessity and demand to be impacting on the practitioner community will also play a part in driving engagement with the national security community.

Navigating the divide: overcoming obstacles and developing best practice

The crossover of the two communities is not without fundamental pressures and tensions: it does not necessarily follow that scholarship can be directly applied to the business of the national security community. Academic output is not geared to directly influence decision-making or government policy, nor is it necessarily written in a way that assists the official in making such decisions. Gaining the maximum benefit of closer interaction between academics and government analysts is likely to require sensitive negotiation. There are three key complications or obstacles to engagement between the two communities: *the need for secrecy*; *the need for speed* and *the changing requirements of the intelligence community*.

The simplest, and arguably most effective, forms of engagement are those involving in-house talks, lectures and discussions either held at a location in the academic community, or within the national security community. These events may be of varying size, depending on the complexity of the topic, the range of subject matter experts available and the level of interest. It is reasonable to assume that specifically tailored and structured in-house events could offer high-level cost-effectiveness in terms of the time available to government analysts. In this way, engagement between the two communities takes the form of a flexible liaison resource with the ability to gain high impact tailored to specific targeting.

Conclusion

Systematic engagement with outside agencies, be they private industry, public bodies or third sector organisations, is increasingly the norm for British academics. There are good moral, intellectual and practical reasons to promote this impact, in addition to the contractual compulsion engaged that is generated by the presence of the impact agenda in the Research Excellence Framework in the 2014 exercise and the one that reports in 2021. We have focussed our attention on a narrow field of inquiry: that of intelligence studies scholars interacting with national security practitioners, but the lessons we outline in this chapter, and those which are left to be drawn from our data, contribute to the wider understanding of how research impact works and how it can be optimised. These lessons are not unique to national security; indeed, we think that they are capable of being applied to all controlled professions, be they security-based, those involving vulnerable people or those involving economics, trade or intellectual property: any sector where the practitioner partners have an obligation of confidentiality. We have focussed on a disciplinary area where it should be more difficult to secure access, precisely because the partner organisations are the objects of our research. For those academic disciplines who do to share these referent objects, we would expect that impact partnerships should be more straightforward to form, but that the lessons we have drawn would still be relevant.

There are many synergies and benefits to be drawn for both the national security and academic communities from working more closely together. There are also some significant challenges to be faced in embedding the relationship further, and these challenges threaten to overshadow the utility of the engagement. A number of important points emerge:

The recommendations of *Blackett* and *Butler* strongly suggested a systematic approach to academic engagement, but this is yet to be achieved in any meaningful way, even with the presence of the 'lessons learned project'. Whilst 'lessons learned' provides one avenue through which Whitehall officials can access academic expertise, help and support, the lack of process around how to approach academic support generally can be a source of frustration to officials.

One option would be a more iterative and ongoing support than the production of a context piece or discreet essay that constitutes open source challenge. For the 'lessons learned' project, this was clearly a challenge beyond our remit or funding, but for the wider issue of academic engagement, it clearly is essential. The challenges that come with this are security vetting, line management, university management alignment and that currently there are no incentive structures in place within academia to promote this as a valuable way of working for academics.

Whilst this chapter has largely focussed on research impact, there are clearly further benefits in education and training opportunities within the UK's university systems to members of the intelligence, security and law enforcement community (Goodman & Omand, 2008). The engagements enjoyed, for example, by King's College London with the Ministry of Defence at the *UK Defence Academy* and the *Royal College of Defence Studies,* by Brunel University with the *UK Ministry of Defence*, and the University of Leicester with the *NATO Defense College*, have produced very strong research and professional exchange (built upon a long history of interaction with academia) and should be replicable by the national security community, even if only in a virtual form due to the financial resource required in such initiatives.

In research terms, the benefits of the collaboration between the security community and academia are mostly instrumental in nature: improved information resources, methods and validation techniques for both communities. Some of the benefits can be located in professional enrichment: from working with skilled professionals from outside of a respective community bubble, and in improving professional techniques. However, significant barriers to developing a closer relationship between the two worlds are likely to remain: security, timeliness, money, organisation and motivation are hindrances that require a recalibration of existing relationships, culture and system. The clichéd claim that these changes need to occur solely in the national security community is too simple. Changes are equally required in individual scholars, their universities and the funding councils, with the emphasis falling on the last two. Yet, the intellectual justification for trying to square these bureaucratic circles, and the benefits that stand to be gained by both worlds are considerable. Enhanced engagement between the two worlds is already increasing, with the development of a security research hub, hosted by a consortium of universities led by Lancaster University, and – as previously noted – in the academic boards being established in the MoD and FCO as well as the NCA's Specials Programme (Lancaster University, 2015). Such initiatives have the power to alter the course of research undertaken by the fields of intelligence studies, defence studies and international relations, increasing and enriching the pool of knowledge available to inform national security decision-making. Despite some difficulties and obstacles in managing an engagement relationship between academia and the national security community, in an era of diversifying national security threats to the United Kingdom interaction between these two worlds should be the rule, rather than the exception.

Notes

1 It should be noted that 'intelligence analyst' is now a recognised government vocation and profession: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service-intelligence-analysis-profession/about (accessed 7th November 2016).
2 Requirements is the technical term for a request for information and/or analysis within government.
3 The ESRC is one of the national research councils, funded centrally but administered outside of government control.

4 www.ahrc.ac.uk/innovation/knowledgeexchange/kewithpolicymakers/publications/ (accessed 16 January 2017).
5 To note that there is now a Horizon Scanning Programme Team within government for whom these recommendations would uniquely apply: www.gov.uk/government/groups/horizon-scanning-programme-team (accessed 7 November 2016).

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